

## 4.7 INTERPRET BODY LANGUAGE

### What to Know

In a job interview, the interviewer will judge you on how you look and how you act, not just on what you say. Your actions, manner, and appearance add up to your body language. They give nonverbal information about your work-related skills, attitudes, and values. In fact, often nonverbal cues are just as important as verbal information in determining who gets hired. After all, everyone the company interviews will probably be qualified for the job. You want to appear to be more qualified than everyone else.

Below are a number of critical nonverbal issues. Familiarize yourself with the positive actions and appearances and use each to your best advantage.

### What to Do

1. Dress for success by following the preceding guidelines. The way you look is the first nonverbal message you send.
2. Offer a firm, warm, whole-hand handshake. Shake hands with both men and women the same way. You wouldn't give men and women different salutes, so don't shake hands differently. Practice your handshake before the interview.
3. Make eye contact with the interviewer(s). Your eyes are your most powerful communication tool. Many interviewers use your eye contact to look for enthusiasm, sincerity, and for possible inconsistencies in your responses. If you use natural eye contact, the interview will become more like a conversation between acquaintances, and you will get over some of your nervousness.
4. Sit up straight, but not stiff, and lean forward toward the interviewer, ever-so-slightly. Good posture will help you listen and make you look interested.
5. Use natural gestures. If you normally use your hands to gesture as you talk, do so in the interview. Gestures help you relax, convey enthusiasm and release nervous energy. One caution here: Avoid nervous gestures such as drumming your fingers, playing with a pencil or cup of coffee, jingling the change in your pocket, tapping your foot, swiveling in your chair, etc.
6. Speak clearly, and not too fast. Expression is a powerful way to show enthusiasm. Do not speak in a monotone voice. Allow your volume to rise and fall and pronounce words clearly. Use good grammar and think before you speak. The interviewer will assess your communication skills based on how clearly you express yourself.
7. Your face conveys your attitude, and reinforces what you say. Avoid frowning. Frowns are an intimidation factor—you don't want to intimidate the interviewer. Smile naturally.

8. Remain attentive and eager to listen. Reinforce the interviewer's comments with nods just as he or she does with you.
9. Notice the nonverbal cues of the interviewer. The interviewer's facial expressions will let you know how well they are listening. If the interviewer seems not to be paying attention, shorten your answers, use an example, or ask a question. If the interviewer gives indications that the interview is almost over, help bring the session to an end.

According to researchers, 65% of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed nonverbally.

*Birdwhistell, R. (1955) Background to Kinesics. ETC., 13, 10-18.*



*Body language is just as important as verbal communication.*